



HOUSE BUDGET COMMITTEE

Democratic Caucus

The Honorable John M. Spratt Jr. # Ranking Democratic Member

December 9, 2003

House Republican' Unkept Commitments to Veterans

Dear Democratic Colleague:

At the end of the session, it is instructive to review the Republican record this year on funding for veterans' programs. House Republicans began the year by trying to cut veterans' benefits. When Democrats and veterans groups opposed those cuts, most of them were restored, and Republicans even promised an increase in funding for 2004. But the omnibus appropriations bill does not provide the funding promised in the budget resolution.

In March, the House Republicans passed their ten-year budget resolution. The House resolution cut funding for medical care and other appropriated veterans' programs by \$14.2 billion below current services levels over the next ten years, and \$8.8 billion below the levels in the President's budget, as estimated by CBO. The House resolution also cut funding for mandatory veterans' benefits by \$14.2 billion over ten years.

In the face of strong protest from veterans groups and Democrats, Republicans adopted a budget resolution conference report that dropped the cuts in mandatory programs. The budget resolution also included \$30.0 billion for appropriated veterans' programs for 2004, an increase of \$2.6 billion above current services levels. This represented an increase of \$1.8 billion over the President's 2004 budget request, which was \$0.8 billion above the 2004 current services level.

The omnibus appropriations bill fails to provide the \$30.0 billion in funding for 2004 called for in the budget resolution. The omnibus provides only \$29.3 billion for appropriated veterans' programs, once the impact of an across-the-board reduction is included. This is \$700 million short of the 2004 funding level for veterans' health care that Republicans promised in their budget resolution. Democrats led the fight to provide more funding to meet the increased demand for veterans' health care. While we can be proud that our continued efforts helped secure this increase of \$1.1 billion above the President's budget request, which will provide \$2.7 billion more than the 2003 funding level that would be available under a continuing resolution, more needs to be done, and we must continue to press the Republican leadership to fulfill their promises.

Sincerely,

/s

John M. Spratt, Jr.

Ranking Democratic Member